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FIELDWORK, 2002–03

DURING the 2002–03 field season the Society carried out an extensive programme of work in the four main geographical areas where its recent research has been focused. Penelope Wilson undertook work at Sais (a report to be published next year) and on behalf of the ongoing Delta Survey, and fieldwork, including numerous smaller projects, continued at Memphis and Amarna. The Qasr Ibrim work comprised a study season based in Shellal and a short period on site, when the wall-painting from the temple of Taharqa was conserved and removed. Reports on these works follow. Such projects would be impossible without the ongoing help and co-operation of the officials of the Supreme Council for Antiquities in Egypt, particularly its Secretary General Zahi Hawass, and the Society and all its field workers would like to extend warmest thanks to them. Thanks must also be expressed to the Director General of Foreign and Egyptian Missions Magdi el-Ghandour, to the staff of the security office in Abbassiya and to the regional inspectorates, all of whom have provided generous assistance. The Society is also grateful for the constant facilitating efforts of Rawya Ismail in the Cairo office of the EES.

The Delta Survey, 2002

WORK continued on collecting information about and surveying sites in the western and central areas of the Delta (fig. 1). The team of Penelope Wilson (field director), Richard Morley (surveyor), Elizabeth Cook and Derek Pretious (surveying assistants) and Mohammed Abdul Rahman Hamed (SCA representative) worked from 6 to 25 September 2002.¹

Topographical Surveys

Tell Qabrit (Lat. 31°13'30"N, Long. 30°35'50"E)

Preliminary notes by A. J. Spencer, 'Roman Sites in the Northwest Delta', in U. Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt* (Studia Aegyptiaca 14; Budapest, 1992), 536.

This small, red-coloured *tell* (fig. 2) is situated in Kafr el-Sheikh province, north-west of Tell Farain and to the east of the small village of Qabrit. There is no concentrated modern settlement around the site, but it is bordered on the south by the road and on the other sides by fields. Some of the border areas are used as crop drying or temporary storage areas by farmers. The *tell* has no cover except for small patches of brush, and the soil is either red in hue or, in places, grey. There is a reasonable amount of degraded

¹ The work was greatly facilitated by the police and guards at Sa el-Hagar and all the sites, by Senne el-Bish and by Rawya Ismail in Cairo. Thanks are due to Roger Dickinson for help with the mapping.

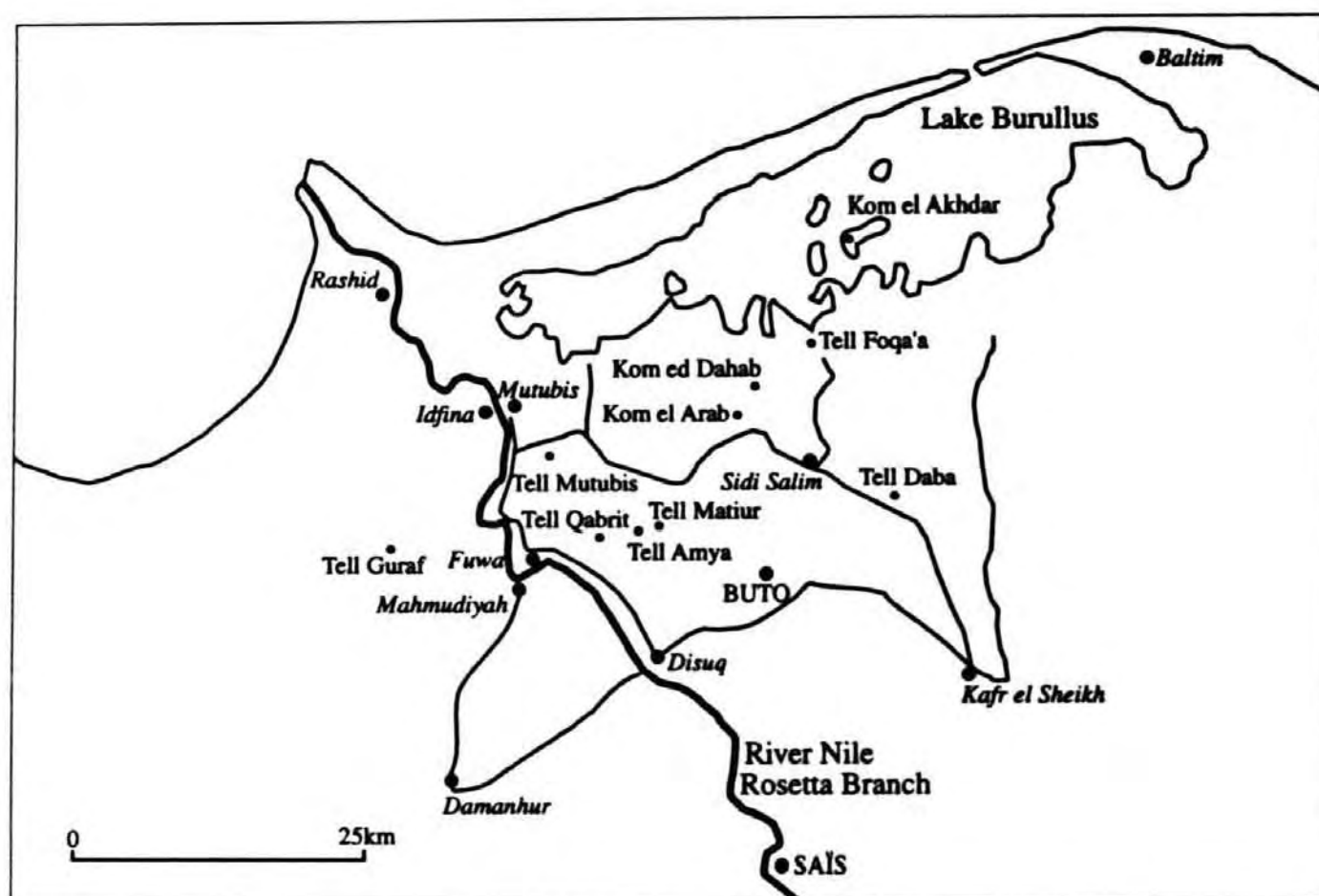


FIG. 1. Area of the Delta Survey, 2002.

pottery, glass and red-brick on the surface, but the *tell* is not densely covered. The dry surface dust is about 20 cm deep and can be scraped away to the damper, more compact soil. In the early morning (and possibly after rain) building patterns can be seen on the surface, mostly occurring in the form of small square structures.

The *tell* is quite low, about 5.5 m in total from its lowest to highest point, but it stands no more than 4.1 m up from the ground level at the site. The dimensions are 875 m (east-west) by 757 m (north-south). The eastern to southern sides of the *tell* are relatively level on the top, descending to the edges in a gentle slope. There are some larger rain gullies running from the top to the edges, and a track goes through the site from east to west. The northern and western sides of Tell Qabrit are more uneven and undulate in a series of small hillocks and mounds. A few of the mounds towards the centre of the site form the highest points of the *tell* and one was used to fix the siting point for the survey ($X=0$, $Y=0$). This 0,0 point is now marked with a permanent iron survey marker. The shape of the *tell* may be due, in part, to wind erosion, with the wind blowing from north to south creating the smoother southern tail-back of the *tell*. It was difficult to discern any pattern to the hills, though some of the modern tracks may indicate more substantial walls beneath the surface.

Some excavations have been carried out at the site by the SCA, including exposure of a series of Late Antique buildings to the south (in 2000) and a red-brick church building in the central area (in 2001). The more pitted areas suggest that there has been some *sebakh* digging on the site and the flatter section to the north-east may be the

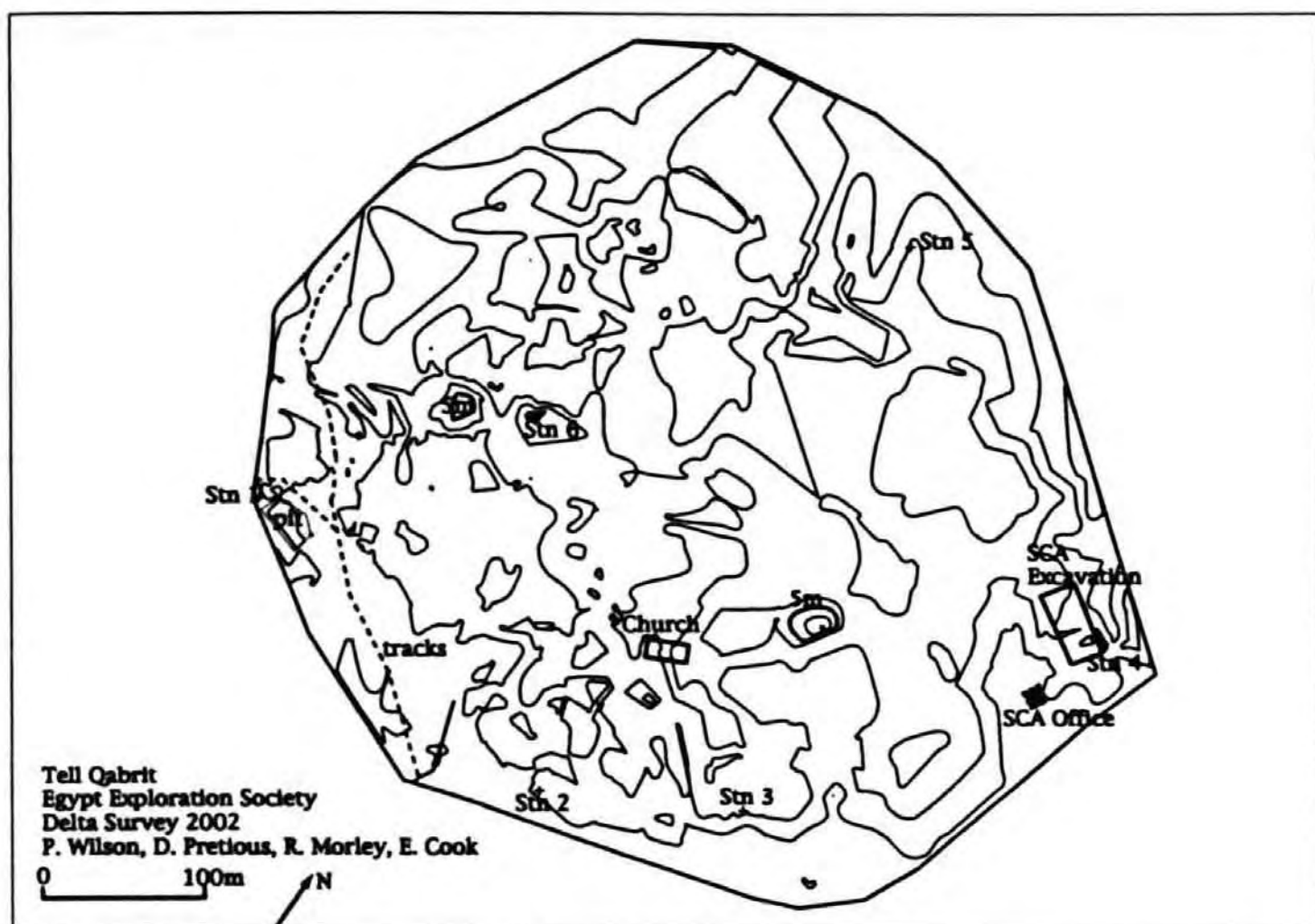


FIG. 2. Tell Qabrit.

remnants of a light railway embankment, perhaps suggesting that *sebakh* was once mined here on a larger scale.

The church building (pl. I, 1) was associated with pottery of the fourth to seventh centuries. The surviving walls measure 26.5 m from east to west and 12.1 m from north to south and were about 1.05 m thick. They are preserved to a height of 65 cm. The church is made from at least two consignments of different sized red-bricks and had a rectangular outline oriented east-west. It had a font in the centre (originally marble faced and lined), but the apse end had been completely robbed out. The building had limestone paving at the west end and possibly marble paving at the east end, though this had largely been removed. The walls of the church were originally plastered and founded upon layers of crushed limestone chips and earlier pottery. Among the debris a block with a few hieroglyphs in raised relief was found, suggesting that a pharaonic site nearby may have provided much of the stone building material, or indeed, that there was a pharaonic part to this site.²

Seven red granite grinding stones were found on the surface, probably having been uncovered during the *sebakh* digging and left there as they were too heavy to take away. One limestone block was also noted.

Recent work for a new pipeline at the eastern side of the site gave an opportunity to look at the material from the trench. Again, the pottery is consistent with the fourth to

² Other hieroglyphic blocks have been reported from here, according to A. J. Spencer (personal communication).

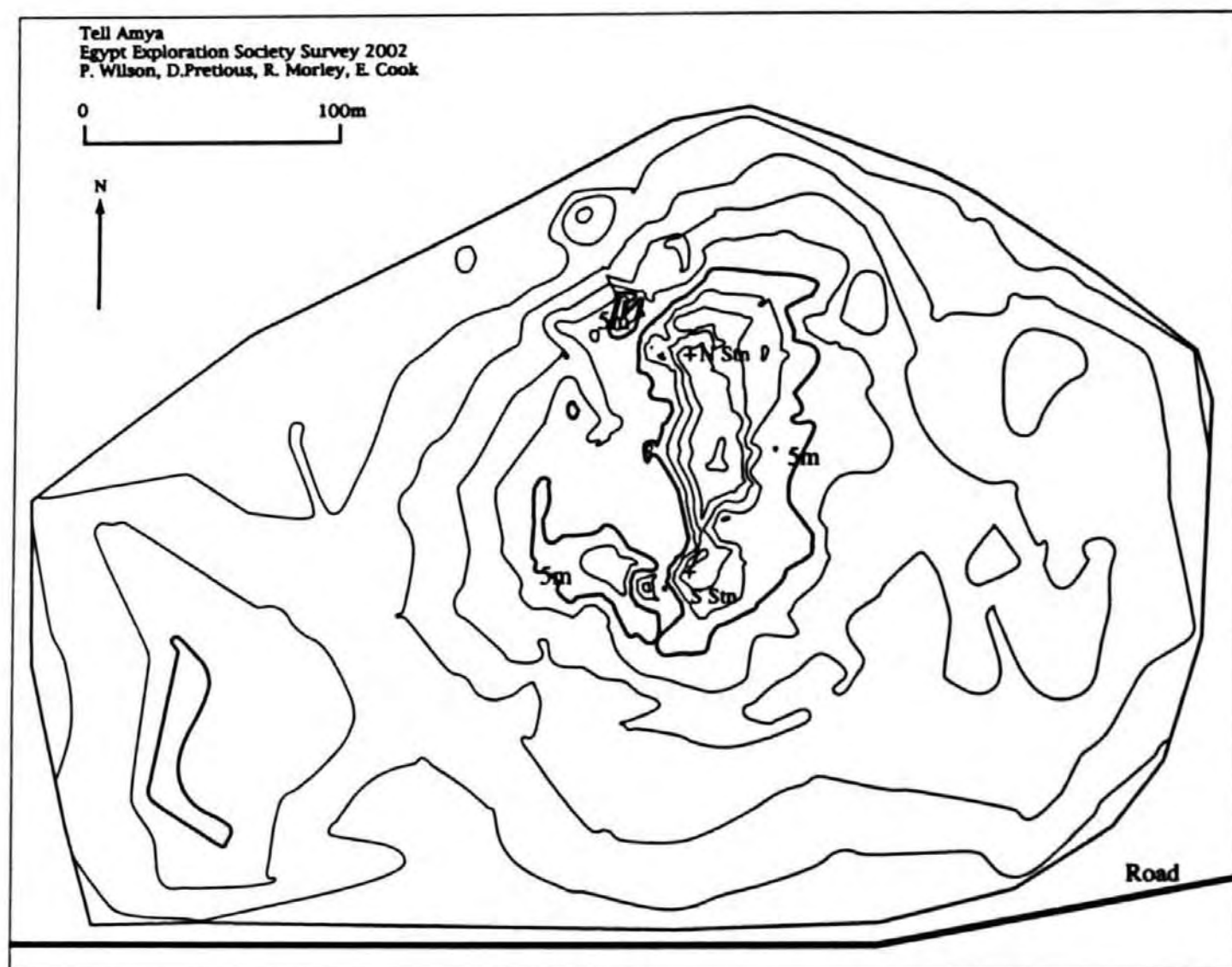


FIG. 3. Tell Amya.

seventh century date and included Palestinian bag-shaped amphora fragments, some red slip ware (thoroughly degraded) and white painted wares.

Tell Amya (Lat. $31^{\circ}13'40''\text{N}$, Long. $30^{\circ}38'00''\text{E}$)

Notes by Spencer, in Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt*, 535-6.

This *tell* (fig. 3) is smaller than Tell Qabrit, being 460 m by 320 m in size and reaching a height of around 8 m to the highest point from the surrounding ground surface (pl. I, 2). There is a high central ridge running north to south across the site, apparently the remains of a former *tell* left thus by *sebakhin* diggers. The whole site has suffered the depredations of digging. It seems to have been cleared away by a workforce some time in the past, starting from the east and west and working towards the central area, where it stopped, leaving the present ridge. The sides of this ridge show that some small-scale digging is still happening here, and a number of pits of about 1.5 to 2 m in depth with sacks left at the site suggest that limited removal of *sebak* or pottery is continuing. The holes left by the digging gave an opportunity to look at the stratigraphy of the site. There was pottery in the sections but not in dense concentrations. There did not seem to be obvious brick features and no signs of burning were noted.

The lack of structures uncovered in these diggings suggests that the archaeological strata of the site have been too extensively disturbed, at least at the present surface level, to be able to determine whether there are any building features. Experience suggests that even in the most difficult cases, the removal of rubbish at the top level, sometimes to some depth, will lead to the uncovering of some kinds of buildings or other structures. The amounts of red-brick at Tell Amya, the patches of grey mud-brick and the pottery strata suggest that structures did once stand here, but their nature cannot be determined by surface survey alone.

The pottery from the site is similar to that at Tell Qabrit, with similar ARS/Egyptian imitation wares, pottery with cream and brown paint stylised plant decoration, imported amphorae, 'carrot' amphorae, and a number of Nile silt-ware bowls or basins with either ribbing or pie crust rims. There is also a good quantity of glass at the site, but, in contrast to Qabrit, there is not the same amount of kiln or slag-like brick work (i.e. bricks which have virtually vitrified and smaller pieces of slag). A number of corroded bronze coins were found on the surface, varying in their state of preservation and ranging from about 0.5 cm in diameter to 2 cm. One large fragment of red granite had been uncovered by the *sebak* diggers. It seems to be an unfinished grindstone, still with roughly cut surfaces.

Tell Amya has less obvious archaeological potential than Qabrit but it clearly forms one of a series of Byzantine sites in this area at which occupation may have ended around the same time. The fact that they form an east-west line, maybe aligning with sites in a north-south formation towards Lake Burullus, may indicate a road or river channel system, now lost. A further regional study may suggest reasons for the existence of the sites in the first place and then for their subsequent abandonment, destruction and demise, with people moving off into other newer towns along the Rosetta Branch of the Nile in the medieval period.

Tell Matiur (Lat. 31°13'50"N, Long. 30°39'05"E)

This site was visited as it formed the most westward of this small chain of sites. From the surface pottery, it dates from the Byzantine Period, during the tenth century.³ The site is 432 m from south-west to north-east and around 280 m from north to south, rising to about 6-8 m above the local ground level. A number of circular brick granaries or storage chambers have been excavated here by the SCA. The site is now almost exhausted, having had very many small test sondages dug here by the SCA. It will become the municipal rubbish dump for Disuq.

Tell Mutubis (Lat. 31°17'13"N, Long. 30°33'33"E)

Following the mapping work undertaken in 2001 by the Delta Survey, the opportunity was taken to recheck some measurements and to carry out four drill augurs at the site.⁴ The results of the drill cores suggest that the present *tell* demonstrates the continuous occupation of this site from perhaps the late Ptolemaic Period to Byzantine times, maybe

³ P. Ballet and T. Von der Way, 'Exploration archéologique de Bouto et de sa région (époques romaine et byzantine)', *MDAIK* 49 (1993), 9-12.

⁴ P. Wilson, 'Tell Mutubis, 2001', *JEA* 87 (2001), 7-8; see also photographs and notes by A. J. and P. Spencer, 'The EES Delta Survey', *Egyptian Archaeology* 16 (Spring 2000), 25-7.

from the first century BC to around the ninth century AD. Much of this city was founded on clean alluvium (flood deposited sediment) and also, perhaps, on drained marsh areas. On the eastern side of the *tell*, the existence of cultural material such as pottery to a depth of nearly 4 m suggested that there had been an older settlement at this side of the current *tell* and that the Roman town had grown from it. Clearly further work would be needed to determine the extent of this area and its date in relation to the rest of the *tell*. Tell Mutubis, then, may have an older history than is at first apparent.

Tells Visited

Visits were paid to a small number of other sites and information collected about others. As can be seen below, the modern Survey of Egypt maps prove to have incorrect names for the sites or none at all, and many sites have been lost since the earlier Survey of Egypt maps.

Kom el-Akhdar (Lat. 31°26'55"N, Long. 30°49'47"E)

This is a large *tell* inside Lake Burullus, marked on the Survey of Egypt maps as Gezira Kom el-Akhdar. The *tell* has a narrow rectangular shape and a number of small inlets and harbours which allow boats to pass through the reeds and moor. Our mooring point was formed by a number of large limestone blocks, possibly constituting a low wall. The surface of the *tell* is sandy and in places is covered with low-growing shrubs, but it rises to a series of connected low mounds in the centre. There seem to be sandy mud-brick walls from buildings at the tops of these mounds. There is degraded pottery lying on the surface, buried in the sand and in the mud-brick areas. Among the pot sherds were amphora body sherds, including imported orange wares with cream/olive slip and a few red slipped and polished finer wares. There were also glass fragments and some fragments of burnt brick. Although the *tell* is an island, it is used to pasture cattle, and a small onion-like plant is also grown here and collected for medicinal purposes. Some small-scale digging has taken place and a large circular storage bin of pottery had been uncovered. The surface material is not dense and the meagre remains extend mainly over the high parts of the island, as far as could be judged.

Tell Foqaa (Lat. 31°22'7"N, Long. 30°46'59"E)

The site is marked on the modern Survey of Egypt map, but not named. The *tell* is inaccessible by road as it is surrounded by fish farms with banks built up into dykes along which the footpaths run. The *tell* is large in size, rising smoothly to a central high point containing an iron survey marker (a second marker is on the eastern side). To the north-east, there is a more hillocky area on the sides of which some house plans are visible. The surface has no plant cover, but instead, the soil is coloured red by the degraded pottery and red-brick at the site. As the area is not often visited, the differences in soil texture can be seen by simply walking across the *tell*. In some places it is very soft and in other much firmer, perhaps where there are underlying structures. The surface material includes pottery such as some ribbed amphorae, ARS/ERS, glass, burnt red-brick and slag, all quite eroded and degraded.

The site seemed to be Roman in date and relatively unaffected by *sebakhin* digging. It could be threatened by further exploitation of the fish farms.

Tell Guraf (Beheira Province) (Lat. 31°12'52"N, Long. 30°25'5"E)

The modern Survey of Egypt map labels this impressive *tell* as Tell Kafri. It rises to a series of high points of which the greatest is about 15 m above ground level. The main central mound and the smaller western mound both show building plans and, in some places, the surface has either been cleared or eroded to reveal small rectangular red-brick foundation structures. At least three of these were seen on this visit and they are assumed to be foundations because of their regular size over the different parts of the site. The *tell* is red in colour and covered in pottery, glass and brick dating to the Roman and Late Antique Periods. On the southern and northern sides are a number of gullies made by rainwater from which larger fragments of pottery could be extracted.

Qasr Mahmudiyah (Beheira Province)

This site was marked on the Survey of Egypt map as lying south of town of Mahmudiyah. The site of this *qasr* (fort) took some time to find because the land is now occupied by new buildings, including a school and some fields. The area had been flattened and there was no sign of a *tell*. Local residents confirmed that it had been an antiquities area but was no longer so.

Tell el-Daba (Lat. 31°15'5"N, Lat. 30°51'38"E)

The site is not marked on the current Survey of Egypt map. The *tell* had been occupied by a petroleum company rig, but this has now been removed and only the concrete bases for some of its buildings remain. The northern edge of the site was being used as a soil dump, though it was not clear if the soil there is from this *tell* or elsewhere. There was a large depression on the north-eastern side of the site which looked like an old *sebakh* excavation. Across the centre of the site was a whole series of small mounds, no more than 4 m maximum above the basic ground level. The *tell* measures approximately 400 m (east-west) by 300 m (north-south). On the south-west side there was a series of brick chambers, with arched doorways and vaulted ceilings. Otherwise there was comparatively little to see on the surface except for degraded burnt brick and pottery of Roman date.

Kom el-Arab (Lat. 31°18'59"N, Long. 30°43'20"E)

The Survey of Egypt map names this site incorrectly as Tell Kafri. This was a compact *tell*, rising to at least 10 m above the ground level. Its south side was smooth sloping to the summit of the mound and the north side was steeper in slope. A petroleum company had also been based at this site and left a road running north-south on the east side of the site. A football pitch now occupies the southern side of the *tell*. Three granite grinding stones were noted, along with Roman-Late Antique pottery and glass, a few corroded bronze coins and some fossil wood. It was noticed that this material was more obvious on the northern side, and some small holes had recently been dug here.

Tell ed-Dahab (Lat 31°20'14"N, Long. 30°44'17"E) (pl. I, 3)

This site was visited because it seems to be one in a north-south chain of sites, perhaps along the line of a silted-up river channel. In fact, there is an *ezbet* here called Ezbet Kom ed-Dahab and the houses here probably also occupy a former *kom*. The antiquities area of the *kom* is under the cemetery of the hamlet and extends for about 150 m north-south and 60 m east-west. There is little archaeological material to be seen on the surface, as the debris from the older tombs is scattered on the ground. A survey marker (iron rail) is situated to the west; this is an area which could be tested with drill cores.

Future work for the Delta Survey will concentrate on the other Roman-Late Antique *tells* in the western and central Delta.

PENELOPE WILSON